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ABSTRACT

Noting that scholars are beginning to take the relation between media corporations and other commercial corporations as seriously as they have traditionally taken the relation between the state and the press, this paper focuses on the public's belief that media are largely apolitically and value neutral. The paper argues, however, that the media are clearly value-laden, advocating consumer life styles and the legitimacy of corporate domination. The paper situates this argument in the larger context of a "new world order" where competing value-laden institutions are especially weak, where media messages are diverse, and where the need for new public political forums are great and the prospects for them bleak, and hence where the possible effects of this domination are greater. The paper then suggests ways to reclaim the public value debate. The paper concludes that it may ultimately become the responsibility of the academic to serve as watchdog for both corporation and state, since the leap required to consider a variety of values including social good, collective development as well as objectivity, free enterprise, and individuality is more likely to come from academe. (Contains 85 references.) (NKA)

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Corporations, the Media Industry, and Society: Ethical Imperatives and Responsibilities

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Corporations, the Media Industry, and Society: Ethical Imperatives and Responsibilities

Numerous studies of late have focused on the social consequences of the relation between media industries and other commercial corporations (e.g., Schiller, 1989, Bagdikian, 1990, Luke, 1991, Turow, 1992) While the public lags significantly behind in concern, gradually scholars are beginning to take this relation as seriously as they have traditionally taken the relation between the state and the press. Ideologies and education programs still change slowly. Little evidence suggests that media professionals are ready to pursue a watch dog function in regard to corporations as vigorously as they have government. And while most people would fight a governmental buyout of media industries they appear to remain unconcerned with the consolidation of private ownership. Even scholars have yet to do much to reform conceptions of censorship and biased reporting based on the growth of corporate over governmental ownership and control.

This is a serious problem. With the legitimacy and perhaps even power of governments in decline worldwide, the corporation can easily be seen as the more potent elitist political force and as having a greater interest in extending influence over the vast majority of people. Significantly, commercial corporations even in democratic states do not operate by democratic principles. The inequitable distribution of political, economic and social power supports a narrow and distorted system of interest development and representation in most democratic societies.

As developed elsewhere (Deetz, 1992), while corporations have always had great influence in "company towns" and on state political processes, the affects have become both more subtle and pervasive as the degree of social interdependence has increased. Corporations have come to over-shadow the state, the civil community, and the moral community in making decisions directing personal lives and general social development. The state's power is exercised primarily through restriction and crude guidance through taxation and environmental protection, while corporate organizations make most proactive decisions regarding technology development, utilization of natural resources, product development, working relations among people, and distribution of income. Most of these decisions are based primarily on social values of corporate

leaders rather than simple market and other economic conditions.

But further, corporate values and practices extend into life outside of work, providing personal identities, structuring time, constraining child rearing practices, influencing education and knowledge production, directing entertainment and news production, rewarding personality types, influencing availability of the arts, and defining and preferencing consumption-based life styles. While economic reasons are often given for corporate choices, they have clear political motives and consequences. And even the state's relatively limited restrictive power is limited by massive corporate influence on legislative processes and policy boards (Laumann & Knoke, 1987).

Let us be clear. We are not suggesting a corporate conspiracy with a group of top executives intentionally directing people's lives. Certainly different corporations and corporate managers, even the small group owning and sponsoring media, operate with different and often conflicting agendas. Influence is not monolithic. Still they largely share core values and advocate them in innumerable subtle and diverse manners. The core values of greatest significance are conceptions of how the social world works, the definition of the quality of life in terms of the amount of consumer goods, and the preference for making social choices through individual economic decision making coordinated in a contrived market rather than discussion-centered decision making coordinated in representative political processes.

Rather than intention or organized control, we believe that a constellation of forces have led corporate decisions to take the place of important democratic public choices. The fact that this influence is often unintentional and disorganized does not make it insignificant. If the government, church, or any other group in our society had such control of public decisions, even if unwittingly, we would be disturbed and concerned. We would ask how this could happen in a democracy. And, we would seek meaningful representation or a vote on these decisions. Most certainly, most democratic peoples of the world would object to such consolidation in any institution controlled by an elite with shared values even if they were assured some degree of representation. And further, if control of critical social decisions was centralized, few democratic people would find it prudent for the principal media to be controlled by the same group. This is,

of course, the current situation in the US.

The public consents to this arrangement based on three interrelated ideological moves. First, a distinction between the public and private which grants property rights more fully than rights of community self-determination. Second, a belief that the marketplace provides an adequate forum for the production of diversity and public representation through entrepreneurial action and "dollar" voting (the greater faith in market economy than democracy). And third a belief that media are largely apolitically and value neutral. Not only do these beliefs support the further development of existing arrangements but they are actively supported by media messages themselves.

While the the first two beliefs are interesting in their own right, in this paper we will focus on the third. Initially we will argue that the media are clearly value-laden, advocating consumer life styles and the legitimacy of corporate domination. Next we will situate this in the larger context of a "new world order" where competing value-laden institutions are especially weak, where media messages are diverse, and where the need for a new public political forum are great and the prospects for them bleak, and hence where the possible effects of this domination are greater. And finally we will suggest ways to reclaim the public value debate.

Culture, Inc.: The Direction of Commercials, Entertainment, and News

Woven into the history of the mass media in America is the often-voiced determination not to allow one segment of society overwhelming power to direct public choices, media should serve democracy rather than vested interests. That fact that corporations have managed to coopt this power is due in part to the fact that, in this ideal battle against the forces of domination (however imperfectly it was carried out in practice), the villain was always seen to be the government. Early newspapers specifically targeted government as the leading institution against whose influence it was important to guard. Presenting themselves in a somewhat adversarial relationship with government (cf. Turow, 1992), journalists codified their role in a democracy as that of "a public watchdog overseeing the state" (Curran, 1991). That the industry historically saw itself in these terms is reflected in such moves within the profession as the 1947 Hutchins

Commission Report, cemented by Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm's (1956) "Four Theories of the Press," which emphasized the role of the American press as responsible and accountable to the public (for a fuller description, cf. Altschull, 1990). And legislation such as the 1927 Federal Radio Act, which among other things required broadcasters to give equal opportunity to political candidates, bore witness to the way in which American culture defined the media through its relationship with government.

This perception of the press as watchdog for the people against government was based on a strong bond between communities and their newspapers, as well as diverse ownership. Bagdikian (1992) states that in 1900, virtually every city had at least one newspaper, which intensely pursued its readers' interests. If papers failed in this task, there was considerable likelihood that a rival paper would be founded to capitalize on the untouched audience. In this situation, an open competitive market situation helped assure availablity of competitve views and information, and thus facilitated the positive role of the press in a democracy.

The New Context for Domination

This situation has changed, however. By the end of the 1980s, over 90 percent of all American communication facilities (including newspapers, broadcast outlets, cable systems, telephone lines, relays, and satellites) were owned and controlled by a small number of companies (Schiller, 1989). In the 1980s alone, the number of corporations that controlled half or more of the media business declined from over 50 to under 25 (Bagdikian, 1992).

Moreover, historically, newspapers' relationship with advertisers was seen (however accurately) to support and enable their watchdog role vis-a-vis government by rendering the media financially independent (Turow, 1992). But as American mass media came under control of national and multinational corporations, the drive to maximize profits transformed newspapers, radio, and television from carriers of news and entertainment to carriers of advertising (Bagdikian, 1992). The audience on which they depended for their survival thus shifted. The media exchanged freedom from government pressure for a much heavier form of bondage. Both ownership and primarily economic sponsorship changed, and both changed in the direction of large commercial corporations. This "bondage" has important potential

repercussions for our society. Onesided control and economic monopoly in media has broader implications than similar relations in other industries. As Bagdikian (1992) put it, "newspapers [and by a similar analysis all media] represent an institution which, unlike steel mills and automobile companies, affects the roots of democracy" (p. 201).

Do Ownership and Sponsorship matter?

The recent transformation of ownership patterns has had important consequences on the media in at least two crucial areas. Corporate ownership of the media has facilitated the advocacy of commercial corporation values in ways unmatched by other institutions alone or collectively. And the shift in ownership also has virtually silenced any watchdog role the media might have played vis-a-vis corporations--an admittedly unlikely role in any case, given the history of journalism.

Value Advocacy, Hegemony, and Consent Processes. An important effect of consolidated corporate ownership and sponsorship is the increasingly proactive role played by corporations in society. "A corporation dependent on public opinion and government policy can call upon its media subsidiaries to help in what the media are clearly able to do--influence public opinion and government policy" (Bagdikian, 1992, p. 30). Or, as Schiller puts it, "[C]orporations, in addition to selling their goods and services in global markets, are allowed to express their views and perspectives on issues that affect people everywhere" (Schiller, 1989, p. 52). And as significant as the particular political positions advocated are the more pervasive and subtle advocacy of worldviews and life styles which themselves have political consequences. While commercial messages, for example, are aimed at selling products, they primarily advocate ways of living. One can only imagine the social and political differences if commercials aimed at the reduction of social differences (rather than their production) or if piety or community service had such powerful advocates. Few political groups have ever had such definitional power, and so little citizen objection.

The advocacy of commercial corporation values and their infusion in popular culture through the media is not the product of current patterns of media ownership, although it is facilitated by them. That the media "create" the reality they present, rather than mirroring reality

"out there," has been shown in a plethora of recent studies. The demonstration that these created realities follow values supportive of the leaders of commercial corporations is equally apparent. Altheide (1974), McCombs and Shaw (1977), Tuchman (1978), Gans (1979), Bennett (1983), and Parenti (1986), among others, have shown how standard media "frames" structure the content and presentation of news, thereby providing a concept of human responsibility, "objective" accounts of events, and particular conceptions of the causal relations among events. For example, the routine and daily report of such a thing as the Dow Jones Industrial Average reminds people of the importance of the health of the economy (even though it is more an index of institutional confidence and corporate profitability than creation of jobs, quality of products, or consumer income) and the absence of any equivalent index of the arts, the quality of jobs, the amount of quality family time, or the availablity of health care hide their importance.

Gitlin (1980), Hall (1977, 1982, 1985, 1989), and Fiske (1989), through use of Gramsci's (1971) concept of "hegemony," penetrated even deeper into the processes by which consensus is engineered through media. Media messages elaborate ideology into common sense and everyday practices by reproducing social conflict in terms derived from the dominant ideology. As Fiske puts it, "Thus television news will often include radical voices, spokespeople from trade unions, from peace demonstrators, or from environmentalists, but these will be controlled doses whose extent and positioning in the news story will be chosen by the agents of the dominant ideology" (p. 39). The media might well be described as the principal "ideological management industry" (Carey, 1987). Turow (1992) has painted a vivid picture of the ways in which ways of portraying the world that harmonize with the establishment are built into the media routines. The inverted pyramid lead, the notion of objectivity, the emphasis on always including two sides of a story guide media practitioners without their realizing it. These values permeate entertainment as well as news media, in which the right of society's institutions to remain powerful is legitimated: "Police shows on television portray the police as rightfully in charge. Situation comedies show going to school as a necessary part of growing up" (p. 158).

These portrayals reverberate in the public's relation to corporations and the work experience. As Turow (1989) argued, mass media "depict conduct by people and institutions

along with the consequences of the conduct. Doing that, the models (a) convey rules guiding the allocation of resources for society's educational, leisure, medical, economic, media, military, and governmental activities (that is, they depict principles of institutional order); and (b) they illustrate preferred ways to employ these resources (that is, they depict styles of production and consumption)" (pp. 454-5).

Current ownership patterns only intensify the legitimation of corporations through media which are hamstrung by outdated production routines and saddled with an old-fashioned view of its role as watchdog over governmental practices. With the cooperation of the media (following their historical agenda of government whistle-blowing), corporations have successfully perpetuated political and economic illusions that go to the heart of public policy. As Bagdikian (1992) put it: "Two major themes in public life, for example, are the excessive burdens that taxes place on the vitality of corporations, and that the labor-union-induced wages are a damaging drag on national productivity and thus on the economy. Both are false but both have been perpetuated by corporate-controlled media for decades" (p. 44). The decline of managerial productivity and constant growth of industrial worker productivity during the eighties is lost from the picture.

And equally important is the constant criticism of government in entertainment, in commercials, and on the news. Private enterprise is considered without evidence to be efficient owing to the false belief that competition keeps them so. Rarely are the inefficiencies of competition itself calculated nor are careful comparative efficiency studies of public and private production reported. In fact, costly government is often a result of shifting cost from the private to public sector. This is seen in environmental clean up, in public retraining programs, and in health care public agencies are forced to provide as private corporations move to hiring temporary workers without benefits. The media make much of the cost of government but rarely pursue the work practices which generate these cost to be paid by the public. Fundamental values are clearly present and advocated.

Media also advocate particular life-styles and everyday life values. Entertainment and commercials, for example, structure the need for products and the corporations that produce

them. The issue is not just that the media tend to support particular images of happiness based on having consumer goods, urging people to buy according to created needs, though this has to be an issue (Ewen, 1976). But the larger issue is that, by establishing the having of consumer goods as the social good, corporations are valued more highly because they are the institutions that provide these goods. The criteria for and evidence of the corporate contribution are presented at the same time.

Indeed, the recent trend toward blurring the distinction between news, entertainment, and advertising--which can be traced to the corporate owners' drive for maximal short-term profits (Bagdikian, 1992)--heightens the corporate ability to mold America's "taken-for-granteds." Ideology is always most powerful when it appears at the assumptive level and produces consents rather than being present in explicit claims or directives for action. As informational stories become increasingly indistinguishable from advertisements and entertainment, the viewer/reader's sense of vigilance and critical capacities are diminished. Nearly all news today is sponsored, written, and promoted by interested parties for public consumption. Free and open expression is clearly neither free nor open in a corporate-directed media with an inequitable distribution of the capacity to generate and coordinate massive resources for shaping modern life.

Radway (1984), Fiske (1989), and Press (1991), among others, have demonstrated ways in which "oppositional readings" or diverse views can be brought to bear in the face of the dominant ideology. However, there is evidence that these readings may be ultimately "domesticated" to hegemonic processes. Both Radway (1984) and Press (1990) found that women who used media oppositionally ultimately incorporated this use into a lifestyle that supported the status quo. In Bagdikian's (1992) words: "A popular culture, quickly and universally transmitted to the whole society, and uniformly designed for the profitable selling of goods, has a profound effect on social values. . . . As competition declines through growing monopoly, and as the smaller voices that create diversity are drowned out by the overwhelming power of the giants, the dominant media corporations have ever greater freedom to shift the balance of news and popular culture away from reflecting what exists in American political, economic, and social culture and, toward creating what they would prefer to exist" (p. xii).

The Sleeping Commercial Watchdog. Current ownership patterns also muzzle any watchdog function that the media might perform with regard to corporate practices. Bagdikian (1992) reports that a survey by the American Society of Newspaper Editors found that 33 percent of all editors working for newspaper chains said they would not feel free to run a news story damaging to their parent firm. As shown above, the media have no history of "watchdogging" corporations to bolster them in the face of current corporate control. Because of their historical role as representative of the people--i.e., free enterprise--against government, the media have rarely pursued the watchdog role in regard to business with the concern and vigor directed to the government, whether the issue be scandals, pay increases, private lives, or inefficiency. The picture is that of an inactive (except in their sex lives), overpaid, corrupt, inefficient government contrasted with an efficient, action-oriented, hard-working corporate manager who occasionally pursues profit too vigorously. This stereotype can be seen reflected in the education of journalists and media professionals, which include considerable instruction on the workings of government but seldom offer coursework on business decisions--and such reporting, when discussed, focuses on producing business news rather than on being the public watchdog. Moreover, the merging of reporting and public-relations training in many journalism programs is an institutional representation of larger social forces and changes (Becker, Fruit & Caudill, 1987). The lines have long been blurred with pseudo-events and press releases, but the connections are now deeper and tied into structural lines of authority, rather than cozy arrangements. Such changes can hardly be seen as innocent in consequences and probably not in intent..

For example, legislative salary raises are pursued with great skepticism while much larger expenses paid by the public, due to the size of corporate salaries, are rarely discussed. Even the release of Crystal's book in 1991 discussing scandalous corporate salaries--filled with stark statistics--made the business pages but rarely received general coverage. But the so-called house bank scandal, which didn't cost the public a cent, was front-page news for over two months, and the potential congressional raise in 1989 from $80,000 to $125,000 was major news for over a month. Can we accept the alibi that " 'Dog Bites Man' is not newsworthy"? Hardly not.

Corporate managerial self-interest in new office space and takeovers are rarely reported in

their actual cost to the corporation or society (Friend & Lang, 1988; Wiedenbaum, 1988). Some business scandals are reported in investigative reporting programs, but the presumed complexity of corporate decision-making and the difficult of getting "proprietary" information tend to promote unclear and messy stories or simple scapegoats. Indeed, it is no accident that corporations' "right to privacy" allows them to guard damaging information from reporters. The threat of lawsuit by pursuing a corporate story or official provides further protection. The outdated idea that it is government that should be guarded against, not corporations, is reflected in legislation such as the 1975 New Jersey Open Public Meetings Act ("Sunshine Law"), which ensures that citizens have adequate advance notice of meetings of public bodies and that these meetings are open to the public while corporate decisions which greatly effect the public are left closed. More often than not, when a corporation shows a lack of social responsibility or illegal action, the government is faulted for insufficient surveillance or action: Corporate irresponsibility demonstrates governmental failure. And news coverage of business and business manager impropriety is produced under the threat of lawsuits, an option rarely available to public officials and agencies.

Gans (1979) provided a vivid example demonstrating the general tolerance for business corruption and inefficiency that reveals more of the processes by which bias is subtly inserted in the news. Quoting him: "The January 2, 1978, issue of Time included a three-page critique of governmental bureaucracy, entitled 'Rage Over Rising Regulation: To Autocratic Bureaucrats, Nothing Succeeds Like Excess'; but a business-section story reporting that General Motors had sent refunds to the purchasers of Oldsmobiles equipped with Chevrolet engines was only one column long and was headed 'End of the Great Engine Flap'. . . . Actually, the news often fails to notice that corporations and other large private agencies are also bureaucracies given to red tape" (p. 46).

Perhaps the most significant example of this was the Savings and Loan scandal. Society will pay tens, perhaps hundreds, of billions of dollars for the bailout of corporate irresponsibility on the part of both lender and borrowers. The press was late in investigating the events; except in some local papers, the story never commanded news time equal to its importance; and in many

national reports the federal government received the primary blame owing to insufficient regulatory surveillance. Clearly, if the press had been more diligent or even responsible in reporting during the industry's eight-year "suicidal spree," intervention might well have happened (Hume, 1990). As Hume (1990) strongly asked, "Why did the well-paid, well-educated, and constitutionally protected press corps miss the savings and loan scandal, which is the most expensive debacle in U.S. history?" The story was "too complicated and boring to interest mainstream journalists. Regulatory changes--such as accounting tricks and reduced capital requirements that helped paper over the first phase of the savings and loan crises in the early 1980s--weren't big news." Even Hume's analysis, which is one of the few public explanations of why the press failed in its self-professed role, seems far too ready to accept commercial and value explanations without condemning or even critically examining them. The commercial pressure for exciting news protects the commercial corporate enterprise. What other commercial pressures might exist? And what values remain hidden that protect the corporate world for serious examination?

And further, not only do media messages favor corporations and their values over those of other institutions, they reduce the voice of the corporation to the voice of upper management and present this class in an especially favorable light. Heroes are made of even largely unethical managers like Ross Perot and Donald Trump. But more subtle and repetitive messages may be even more significant. A few examples may suffice.

Take the Japanese "bashing" of a couple of years ago. The media fueled a major controversy by proclaiming that the Japanese were calling the American worker lazy. This distorted message had a double effect of encouraging the average American to side with U.S. industrial managers against the Japanese, and of repeating American managers' own public relations campaign against workers. Fair attention to Japanese Prime Minister Kiichi Miyazawa's statement would neither have created a controversy nor aligned the political battles in this way. He did clearly and straightforwardly identify a "lack of work ethic." But while the media at first widely misrepresented his position as referring to American labor, his analysis carefully specified the quick-payoff financial games of managers and the unwillingness to invest in the long-term

health of the company or industry.

Perhaps a more subtle, and more routine, sleight of hand occurred in an unremarkable report a couple of weeks ago. ABC news reported on a successful worker-participation program. As ABC reported, "Management at [company name] has found a way to change worker attitudes and improve product quality." What the news report failed to mention was that it was management's desire for control that installed the failed assembly line, and that is was this authority-based supervision that posed the problem to be overcome. Indeed, it was management who sustained this arrangement long after participatory forms were shown to be superior. But most importantly, management did not create a new worker attitude or skills--workers had always had these qualities, but they were actively suppressed by working arrangements. A better report would have said that management attitudes had been changed by economic situations that required that workers now run part of the plant. The workers natural positive attitudes toward quality and productivity are now being allowed to influence the design of work processes.

The Public Manque

In sum, corporate decisions have become increasingly central to all of modern life. And public perception has not caught up with the changing face of media ownership. We would probably be greatly concerned if an institution like the church came to dominate the media--and the media presented themselves as guarding against that very possibility by government. Yet the current control of media content by corporations is equivalent to a scenario in which the government or church produced a "commercial" (or propaganda, depending on the institution of concern) every 10 to 15 minutes on television and had primary say over the programming. We know something of that because we know moments in history when such domination was accepted and when it was rejected. We would feel oppressed and deeply concerned if billboards had pictures of national leaders on them with encouraging statements, even if we were in agreement with the message. Why don't we feel the same outrage when confronted with billboards depicting people drinking beer and defining every aspect of value and life-style?

The recent outcry of the artistic community over possible NEH judgments on the appropriateness of artistic expression and the possibility of new censorship must be a concern for

us all. But commercial influence and indeed virtual censorship has been many times more extreme, yet it passes with occasional reference. Dominance is dominance; the question is, Who should be the master, and when should we be outraged or have a say? We rarely escape commercial messages entering our home and work, from the breakfast cereal box and newspaper in the morning through the billboards and radio spots of the day to the television commercial and telemarketing calls at night. It is hard to imagine allowing any political or religious group such ownership or the space and time to define life-styles, home life, political positions, and values.

No meaningful forum exists for the equivalent presentation of alternative perspectives. While congress required that broadcasters serve the "public interest" and the Fairness Doctrine at one time required opposing views be aired on controversy, the media, even in regard to these, largely define "public interests" and "controversy." As Williams (1977) argued, any definition of "public interest" depends, finally, on a consensus version of 'public' or 'national' interest: a consensus which is first assumed and then vigorously practiced, rather than a consensus which has been arrived at and made subject to open review" (p. 39). While few suggest any simple direct effects from media messages, the collective influence of media on cultural beliefs and values appears without question (see Chesebro, 1984). The force of such studies is augmented by data on media usage showing that the average person spends four to six hours a day receiving media messages (and 8 to 10 hours receiving other corporate messages at work). The sun rises and sets with corporate messages. Where is the space in between?

Certainly there is nothing wrong in itself with corporations or any other group influencing media, education, knowledge, families, or culture. But with control should come discussions of responsibility. When no group alone or collectively, including public agencies, has the capacity to compete with the dominant group or demand responsibility from it, then meaningful democracy is threatened and the capacity of communities to meet their needs and self-determine their future becomes limited.

From Imbalance to a Crises of Values

Up to this point we have reviewed a fairly straightforward set of conceptions showing an imbalance in public decision making arising from the growth in power of commercial corporations and extended through their ownership and support in the media. Clearly some social values are being extended over other. Every individual is effected by their own produced developmental partiality and one-sidedness. The material and social development of the local and world community moves in particular directions at the expense of others. And particular groups benefit far more than others in these developments. Any set of arrangements and practices that influence individual and social development and define the distribution of the world community's wealth need to be evaluated in moral as well as practical terms.

From such a view we would have to consider these arrangements immoral as well as irresponsible and impractical. Here the concern is with morality. Though such arrangements also leads to bad business decisions and difficulty for commercial corporations to efficiently use society's resources to meet society's social and material desires. The irresponsible and impractical nature of this relationship is discussed at length elsewhere (Deetz, 1993). Here, we suggest that this arrangement is immoral not based on some a priori, or personally preferred, standard of what choices the society should make, but based on the impossibility of society choosing owing to systematically distorted communication and the lack of an appropriate method of collective determination (see Deetz, 1992, Apel, 1979). Again this has been well developed and we see no need to pursue it further here.

Here we wish to move the discussion up a level of abstraction to suggest that the "domination" thesis advanced to this point must be thought in a larger social context where this domination of values resides along side a fragmentation and crises of values. Clearly no simple dominant ideology thesis explains well how media (see Fiske, 1989) or any ideology operates in modern society (see, Abercrombie, et. al.,1980).

Ben Barber (1992) appropriately described our contemporary context as an oscillation between Jihab and MacWorld. On the one hand privatized and parochial values lead to culture

(religious, ethnic, group) wars with a weakened capacity to find organizing concepts for joint action in an increasingly interdependent world. And, on the other hand, Western commercial, consumerist domination is present. In fact one of the primary limitations of the critique of corporate colonization is the fear of its opposite. But historically disorder and domination have made cozy bedfellows. The challenge is first to understand how they reside together in a social context and then to structure the alternative.

The New World Order

One hesitates to speak of the "new world order" since such an elastic expression, which rolls off the tongue so easily, has acquired many conceptions by politicians and journalists. But despite the difficulty of clear articulation massive changes have occurred only highlighted by the breakup of the Soviet Union. The most forceful conception runs something like this. With rapid changes in transportation and information technologies, international commerce and interdependence have forced an emerging order perhaps regional or even global in scope. The nation state system which since feudal time has provided a particular kind of order and integration of competing institutional demands is too defined by geographic boundaries to survive the transition. While the state politically driven system will survive in a vestigial form, increasingly it will service the emergent commercially driven system. Such a change has a stabilizing effect to the extent that state conflicts decline and a destabilizing effect in the emergence of religious and ethnic conflicts that the state system managed or suppressed.

To some extent this development is very exciting in that it initiates an area of freedom and autonomy for the individual which is rare in history. The world community is heterogeneous in ways no state could be. Mass media in extending commercial over state values fosters the extension of individualism and awareness of alternatives, alternatives that often have to be bought. Place of birth loses much of its defining force and one's play in the system is filled with possibility. The vivid presence of heterogeneous life styles and cultural practices leaves open the possibility that one can be whatever can be negotiated within the system. This in one sense is a force of democratization. As Schlesinger (1993) described in summary of Bauman's (1991) work: "Social coercion and central state power are replaced by individualized acts of

collectivizing will. Such weak social bonds, seemingly chosen as though we were just consumers in the shopping mall of culture, offer us a choice of lifestyles and supposedly endow us with flexible, easily shaped identities" (p. 8).

But several difficulties arise. Neither the state system nor the commercial one can operate without significant value inculcation by other social institutions and considerable voluntary compliance along dominant values by individuals. The state system implicitly understood this and fostered local communities, family life, and religious practices. States which did not do this have tended to fail. If domination of the individual were to occur it occurred locally and heterogeneity tended to be preserved in complex states due to the independence of local units and diverse religious practice. Both wide-scale voluntary compliance to values and rules and value diversity could occur and the state provided laws at the edges of compliance and explicit ways for resolution value conflicts when they occurred. The political process provided for discussing differences and reaching agreements.

The commercial order in contrast has consistently undermined primary social institutions and has translated most moral and value issues into questions of expedience. The question remains whether any rules and invented secondary institutional processes (such as day care, therapists, training) can provide the stability given by voluntary compliance and primary institutions such as family and friends.

Family and community life have changed greatly for most people during the past twenty years as a result of work relations and decisions. Leisure time has decreased, community participation has decreased, and family time has greatly decreased. The development of a consumer life style plus work expectations, has made the work process central to all of life reversing the historical trend toward the technologically-assisted reduction of labor. The continuation of traditional male-centered work values and processes, unnecessary control over the work arrangements, inadequate flextime arrangements, and the refusal to give women equal pay for equal work, all distort family and community decision making and leave many individuals in "no win" choice situations.

Further, the effect of takeovers, short-term corporate decision making, and unnecessary

economic instability have created costly instabilities for families and communities. Few communities require anything close to a "people impact statement" before permitting major corporate decisions. In addition, research continues to demonstrate high correlations between having little freedom and control at work and a variety of mental and physical health problems (Sashkin, 1984).

Currently the system stays afloat based on a kind of irrationality present in large segments of the population. They consider moral issues, they pay their taxes, they think about the survival of society, they ask what would happen if everyone did it, and they obey social rules even when they will not be caught. But, as more and more individuals see their values and morality as a cost to be born by them in this new system, will they begin to operate like the ones they see making it, operating solely on the bases of self-interests? Will there be any group that operates on the bases of a conception of the larger social good? We potentially move from domination by particular conceptions of moral order and social good to the absence of any conception. And further if values and conceptions of good survive, will these things find any means of expression in a system of economic rather than political representation (see Schmookler, 1992, on the difficulties)? Since the commercial system operates from a conception of free individual choice, it fits well with ideologies developed to limit the state. We have yet to develop equivalent ideologies to support the need for the collective good to have an expression in opposition to private lifestyle/economic and commercial interests.

Media in a World Without Foundations

With the decline of primary institutions, the media are provided with a fertile ground for having greater impact through manufactured consent. In a society with strong communities, religious groups, and families, media messages are not only received by individuals with strong, intact, social supported interpretive frames but they enter a context of multiple competing messages. As corporations have undermined and colonized competing institutions, its direction of mass media has greater consequences. And as media itself accentuated the decline of community through pulling the church and "neighbors" into the television set and radio and privatizing entertainment the effect is amplified.

One way to conceptualize the decline of value bearing institutions is to think of the contemporary society and its members as increasingly without fundamental foundations. This has been discussed mostly in Western societies in the literature of post-modernists (see Crook, Pakulski & Waters, 1992; Rosenau, 1992).

Many contemporary social theorists seem to agree that Western society has lost its four foundation faiths or centers: (1) the unitary-autonomous person, (2) an integrated social order, (3) an objective external world, and (4) a progress driven cybernetic. Such changes can be seen in our art, music, sciences, and business practices as well as in our most intimate feelings and relationships. While some lament the loss of "centers" and fear society cannot survive without them, most of us saw these foundations as grounds for oppression and celebrate the new freedoms. As we rush to embrace multiculturalism, diversity, and heteroglossia, however, we also recognize the conflicts generated from new ethnic and sexual identities, the difficulty of living together without rules, the bottomless pit of incommensurable knowledge claims, and the angst over the loss of a future. The loss of foundations and underlying consensus must be seen as a beginning to rethinking our relations rather than as a new justification for power and strategy moves and an end to possible discussion. But commercially controlled media tend to enact power and strategy moves rather than aid this rethinking.

We must still live and work together in increasingly interdependent, if ad hoc and temporary, orders whether media driven or not. We believe it helps if we think of our situation as not the loss of foundations, but the recovery of four arenas of negotiation--negotiation of personal identities, normative rules, knowledge, and value-laden policies. Particular forms and conceptions of communication will be critical to these everyday and ongoing negotiations. The society has missed this because most secretly clutch to their own favorite foundations and have missed how deeply life is grounded in interaction processes. Clearly language and social interaction will be as core to our sciences and our life in the next century as individual-centered consciousness and perception were to the epistemologies and social forms of the last two. New conceptions of communication will be necessary to live and work in this context since common conceptions of communication as expression and information transfer are about as useful to us

today as alchemy is to understanding nuclear reactions. Unfortunately only recently have we begun to think of media in light of new communication conceptions.

We need to explore the implications of this age of negotiation for individuals and their relationships, the reconstruction of social institutions, the construction of knowledge and function of the university, and the choices toward a common future. The central concern will be with how we can reclaim some sense of responsibility in a world both without shared foundations and filled with people trying to cut their best deal. When we begin to think this way, modern media quickly appear problematic.

The media, rather than facilitating negotiation through discussion, cerebrate the fragmentation and liberation and interprets any attempt at social political decision making as an unwarranted limitation on personal freedom. With the possibility of dialogue and political resolution eliminated, power moves combined with market coordination remains as the only ground for joint action. The steering medium, in Habermas's (1984, 1987) terms, are reduced to power and money. But they alone cannot provide a society, hence crises potential in terms of legitimation and motivation failure looms on the horizon (Habermas, 1975). Political impotence, lawlessness, loss of commitment, depression, and cynicism become familiar outcomes. In some sense every individual is thrust into what used to be called a poverty cycle, with no future why save in ways that could get you out. Commitment becomes increasingly costly in a context where only commitment can save us. And the lottery (a modern way to redistribute wealth from the poor to a new elite) becomes the best expression of how to make it in modern society. The possibility and problems both become clearer through looking in more detail at these new areas of negotiation in regard to the media.

Identity Negotiation. In a traditional world, identity was a relatively simple thing. Since the life narratives were simple and the situated person was subject-ed (and sub-jected) with minimal role conflict. In primary institutional processes (family and community) one came to reproduce the principal scripts that would order the world and self for life. It is simple to see that mobility, occupational change, cross-cultural contact, and so forth would make changing identities, role conflict, and role negotiation a way of life for modern people.

As is clear from many literatures, today individuals are subject (and author) to so many discourses that personal fragmentation (Gergen, 1991; Gergen & Davis, 1985) and loss of self (Berger, Berger & Kellner, 1973) is a way of life. What it is to be authentic or truthful in expression of an inner world is increasingly problematic as everyday people feel, what is also developed in the literature, that even the most basic feelings of the insides are arbitrary social constructions (Harré, 1986; Hochschild, 1979, 1983).

Individuals have a variety of options for confronting this problematic situation. Communication studies would emphasize progressive self-differ- entiation, self-redifferentiation, and identity negotiation as an ongoing process in all interaction. The conception of "process subjectivity," for example, invites a responsive self, living the many me's in a dynamic relation with others (Weedon, 1987; Epstein, 1988). Gergen's (1991) conception of "multiphrenia" and Bakhtin's (1981, 1986) conception of "heteroglossia" have both been productively used to develop such a conception of identity.

But the context also allows for a strategic approach where one is free to construct the image which will grant them the largest gain. Not only is this latter approach explicitly encouraged in the business community, television in particular with its ability to construct culturally dominant images without concern for the real complexities of life or linkage with long term consequences invites a strategic self. In such context while the individual feels in control, increasingly such a self lives by self-surveillance (a sense of being as seen by others, Foucault, 1988) and is easily transformed by system demands and finds commitment to any primary institution increasingly difficult.

Social Order Negotiation. Social order in traditional communities was also relatively stable. Authority relations were largely fixed and principles of moral action were integrated into larger conceptions of the natural world. Violations and conflicts were greeted with honored systems of resolution. Cross-cultural relations long ago stressed the traditional faith that one's particular order was grounded in preferences of God and nature. Pluralism and multi-culturalism denote that people accepting very different social orders will have to work together. And, authority relations cannot operate as they have in the past. Power is likely to be shared in

the future and everyone will probably work with and certainly have to deal with people who are culturally different. Neither organizations nor governments are likely to be assumed as legitimate; legitimacy will be a constant production. This can lead to the reduction of unwarranted authority relations and facilitate adaptation and social responsiveness.

But with this freedom too comes the ease of implicit and explicit manipulation. Berger, et.al., (1973) describe the "conversion" prone nature of the individual cast adrift. The sixty second politics of the day describes a public sphere driven by media-enabled affirmation rituals (Entman, 1989). The media have often used this new critical attitude to undermine political institutions and practices rather than to aid their opening and successful functioning. The media's general misrepresentation and criticism of the political correctness discussion, for example, demonstrated more a commitment to the advantages of powerful groups in an expressionist free for all, than a commitment to new tolerance and enabling discussion between different groups (Whitney & Wartella, 1992). In general media have used the decline of community and family standards to increase the use of sex, violence, adolescence misbehavior, and drug culture as part of a marketing strategy, rather than to explore new social arrangements and debate alternative bases for authority.

Knowledge Negotiation. Mediated experience (via any number of technologies and storytellers) will increasingly exceed any "direct" sensory experience. This combined with the gradual public understanding that objectivity was over sold for the sake of prestige for clusters of elite researchers, journalists, teachers, and owners of knowledge. There are not facts only artifacts produced from political social processes. The combination of fewer direct experiences to serve as a check and the lost of faith in the adequacy of report assure that the social negotiation of knowledge claims and experience itself will have to follow lines in which the appeal to an "objective" outside will be seen as a particular rhetorical ploy (Simon, 1991, Rorty, 1989). This change is not complete and should not be misunderstood.

The public really wants to believe in an independent firmly knowable reality. The general appreciation of an anti-rhetoric rhetoric (Ross Perot), the fascination with amateur video shows, docudrama, and reporterless style news are all genuine attempts to get behind the social

construction. But they can not. Nobody can. The combination of a belief in a "reality" and cynicism is disastrous for a democracy. The public is in as bad a place as "representational" researchers. Having only objectivity and relativism available to them, they fail to understand negotiation and codetermination (Bernstein, 1984, 1992). Only discussion can give a truth since the physical world can not.

Media rather than enhancing negotiation tends to exploit the public hope for instant truth without discussion. Media has on the one hand helped unmask the conceit of the expert and given a voice to the person on the street, but on the other has fostered a climate of a babble of opinion without the hope of resolution. News does not differ significantly from the pin-ball like, slogan generating TV talk show. The belief that all claims are merely opinions and the focus on individual expression rather than joint decisions is used to stop discussions rather than start them (Deetz, 1992, Chapter 7). From the sleight of the hand use of statistics in commercials through the strange life-worlds in entertainment (now presented as realism) to the "facts" (artifacts) of the news, a babble of constructions is thrust forth without any attempt to investigate these constructions or whose interests such constructions (or their overwhelming proliferation) serve.

In any important event a media-using public is well expected to both lose background knowledge and become more confused over time as both simplistic reports and a proliferation of contradictory simplistic reports. The drive to eliminate complexity rather than understand it even shapes the political process. Politicians learn to maintain a coherent agenda even in the face of significant changes since positive responsiveness to the complexity of life events assures being labeled as inconsistent and opportunistic. Rarely do any of the media spend time showing how apparently inconsistent research findings actually make sense together or how apparent contradictions are not.

A good example recently occurred regarding children and milk. The media spent days in a tizzy since some researchers were saying cow's milk was good for children and others were recommending against it. The existence of the conflict and the question "should children be given milk?" filled much space and time. People are still left with the question ringing in their ears. Yet the principle that all researchers seemed to accept and which ended the

controversy--some children are lactose intolerant, if yours is don't give them cow's milk, if not cow's milk is fine--was apparently considered too complex and unnews worthy and wasn't reported. This is one simple example of daily occurrences of a media generated socially constructed ignorance.

In their reports not only do the media tend to polarize where the extremes get expression but not the middle, they work to accentuate controversy and expressionism without negotiation. The conservative effect is accomplished by such a proliferation of opinions without careful examination that the expedient liar stands equal with the person of conscience. In many cases the simplicity of the lie is advantaged over the complexity of being in contact with the messy world. The hearer/reader is left feeling that most important issues are unanswerable (ie, that everything does and does not cause cancer) or non-resolvable, hence the "informed" person makes the same kind of out of touch choice as the ignorant one. This is not to argue for a privilege access to reality but to acknowledge the difference between a discussion where each is progressively opened to an outside world from one where self-referential images substitute for the outside. Unfortunately the media rarely provide a window to the world let alone a context for productive discussion.

The decline of foundational thinking will only continue. Virtual reality is upon us and not only as a technological feat. As work becomes more service and "knowledge" centered it becomes increasingly difficult to base judgments on objects, corporate image construction far exceeds substance as a concern, and the construction of personal identity is core to the modern corporation. Mass media will continue to be a primary constructor of knowledge, emotions, and events of the world, even if in the guise of editorless news. Even in information systems, control processes are clearly becoming more dependent on the construction of the information artifact and less on its distribution (Zmud, 1990).

Policy Negotiation. In traditional societies policies were rare since dominant values and people served along side nature as cybernetic centers directing the system along some course toward a future. With the development of the state and organizational complexity and decline of shared values, explicitly formulated policies were central to social planning. As Beniger (1986)

rightly points out, organizational complexity gave rise to the policy center and information control mechanisms of today. As more new technologies are available and pluralism increases, we will have more difference of position and less voluntary compliance along the line of dominant values, hence, the need for explicit policy debate will become greater.

Any policy decision in the contemporary context, because it is arbitrary and seen as such, requires the explicit building of consensus. Even widely assumed to be shared values such as consumerism and progrowth are likely to be more fully questioned as ecological crises become greater and more parts of the world expect equality. We would expect not only a greater number of positions on each social problem, but also a greater number of differences in the definition of what is a problem. In this situation it is not surprising that many tried to depoliticize these issues through deregulation and a hope for a marketplace solution. Dollar (yen, mark) voting appeared preferable to policy debate. Clearly the marketplace solution failed miserably in many regards (Schmookler, 1992; Barlett & Steele, 1992). More information will not settle the debates, for the issue is one of meaning not admitting of artifactual solutions (Boland, 1987).

The media do little to facilitate debate over value based policies. While much discussion focuses for example on preferred policies for continued economic growth little attention is given to the relation of other social values to economic development--more attention is given to new housing starts than loss of farm land and natural resources to oversized spread out housing. Clearly then the media are not neutral as regard to values and policies, they favor commercial corporate values over community based ones, and it makes meaningful policy debate difficult.

Reclaiming Value Debate in the Media

Some conjoining of wider values and a commercial order is essential for both sustainable material and moral development. If it happens at all, this re-articulation will take place through some communication process either a directional one of cultural imperialism or through newly invigorated democratic processes. While the force of the moment appears to be the maintenance or advocacy of new foundations with the media strategically used in these cultural wars, we believe that our best hope rests in using the media in systems of perpetual responsive negotiation.

For such a democratic process to work we need to clarify what is being negotiated, and when and how the media can help in this negotiation.

We have tried to show here what is being negotiated and why the media as structured tend to strategically stop these discussion rather than facilitate them. Media polarization, loss of a meaningful public sphere, glorification of individualism, retention of strategically situated concepts of expertise, the undermining of open consensus processes, vulgar cosmopolitanism (the reduction of diversity to the equivalent of the food fair), and the advocacy of consumerism can all be seen as common and as limiting democratic negotiations.

Going beyond this type of critique to positive developments requires a new way of thinking about communication. One cannot rethink media without it. This can be developed as a focus on communication as a constitutive process rather than an informational one (see Deetz, in press). Since this development is fairly extensive we will not repeat it here. Basically the hope is to open human development in value terms through a new openness and responsiveness to the external world and other people. Media's function must be defined in regard to public discussion. This required working to explore process of social construction rather than mass reproduction of existing constructions. The function of informing has always presumed an information poor society and the presence of established facts. This is a ready excuse for domination. The public is not information poor, it is saturated (Gergen 1991) and facts are always someone's creation in some interest. A deconstructionist, exploratory media facilitates public discussion today while an "informative" one often stops and distorts discussion.

In short, mass media as currently structured are not in a position to take the lead in bringing corporate control to the attention of the public and providing a forum for public debate over value issues. Despite media professionals who are dedicated to their conceptions of their jobs, the media product is enmeshed in corporate control. Certainly examples exist where mass media have presented alternative views of the world. While news critical of a particular business's activities regularly appears on business pages, the business is most often criticized in reference to dominant corporate values of profitability or competitiveness, more rarely are negative effects on consumer and workers considered, and more rarely yet are more general effects on home life and

communities considered. Virtually never are the effects of standard corporate practices and values on the quality of life in the society considered. Barlett and Steele's (1991) "America: What Went Wrong?" is a important exception and represented a major investment by one of the country's leading newspapers in a systematic critique of corporations. But opportunities for this sort of alternate presentation to enter into mainstream press are relatively few. One cannot imagine the type of complex presentation necessary for this to air on television. While the complexity may be greater, even PBS has three pro-business shows and no pro-labor or pro-consumer one.

Nor are media professionals in a position to change current ownership and sponsorship patterns or to mediate their effects. Curran (1991) proposes a model whereby mass media are supported in equal amounts by the private enterprise sector, the civic sector, the professional sector, and the social market sector, based around a core public service sector. But as Ang (1991) has so eloquently argued, even European public service broadcasting is bowing to the commercial pressure to achieve an audience. And Curran offers no practical advice on ways to achieve this reworking of "Habermas's historical idyll" (p. 111).

A number of authors, including Altheide (1974), Parenti (1986), and Postman and Powers (1992) have laid the onus on the viewer to watch "defensively," to develop alternative explanations, and above all, not to watch too much television news.While these solutions may have a role to play, it seems unlikely that media consumers will deny themselves the pleasures documented by Ang (1985) or cease to regard television as an activity that is both relaxing and accompanied by low levels of concentration, activation, and challenge (Kubey and Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Indeed, as these authors note, "The very hallmark of TV viewing is relaxation without involvement or effort" (p. 98).

It may ultimately become the responsibility of the academic to serve as watchdog for both corporation and state. The leap required to consider a variety of values including social good, collective development as well as objectivity, free enterprise, and individuality is more likely to come from academe. This paper begins a demonstration of the necessity of this agenda by connecting the media to the growth of corporate colonization and demise of alternative

value-bearing institutions. Hopefully this will create a new urgency to look at academic works that have begun to show a positive role for the media. These include works that focus on the possibility of creating a new public sphere (see Hardt, 1991; McLuskie, 1992; Dennis, Gilmore and Glasser, 1989) or a reconnection to otherness (see Schudson, 1978, Gadamer, 1975).

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